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Notes on Pine Siskins.

BY CHARLES W. BOWLES, TACOMA, WASH.

THESE are about the most eccentric birds that make a continuous stay in or near Tacoma. They seem more or less abundant at all times, and can be seen feeding anywhere that seeds can be found, from the vacant house-lots in the city up to timber-line on Mt. Rainier, and in all of the desolate river valleys that lead down from the mountain in different directions. The siskins are equally abundant everywhere, and unlike other birds, may be seen in flocks of from ten to fifty or more, at any time of the year, in spring and summer, as well as in autumn and winter, but the flocks are usually larger in winter.

When they begin or end the nesting season is an open question, and it is equally doubtful whether each pair has more than one set of eggs in a season or less than three. If a pair wants to nest, they leave the flock usually accompanied by two or three other pairs and build almost always in a fir. The nests are from ten to thirty feet up, probably often higher, but the birds do not frequent the very large timber much and are well out on the limb so that the nests can be reached only with a rope, or by cutting the branch. These trees are easily located, as all of the accompanying pairs pass most of their time in the tree containing the nest, chirping and twittering continuously. It is quite another proposition when it comes to locating the nest, especially when in large groves, as the structure is usually concealed by lower branches, or by moss when far up in the mountains.

Nests were found at various dates: May 16, one egg just hatching; May 21, young just hatched; May 22, three fresh eggs; August 14, three eggs fresh, and at intervening dates, at all stages of incubation. Sets of one, three, and four were found, but three seems most common.

It might be supposed that the several pairs lay in the same nest, but that above referred to, containing one egg, had three or four pairs superintending, and a nest containing four eggs was the only one seen that had only a single pair.

If the bird is on the nest she will not flush for sticks or stones thrown around her, or even a rope swinging against the twigs supporting the nest, and not usually till the collector has swung out within a foot or two of her.

The nests are about four and one half inches by two inches externally, and one and three quarter inches by one inch internally. They are composed of whatever is easiest to find; externally of twigs, cedar bark, several kinds of moss, dead grass, fir and hair, plant down and sometimes fine roots; internally of fine moss and hair or fur from cats, rabbits, cows and horses. The eggs resemble those of chipping sparrows, but are smaller and much lighter colored in every way, and apparently never have any black markings. The ground color is a delicate light green, with dots, blotches, streaks, and marblings of different shades of lavender and brown, some being quite dark. Measurements average 67x49 inches with very little variation.

The first and last nests were found in Tacoma so that altitude could not have had any effect.